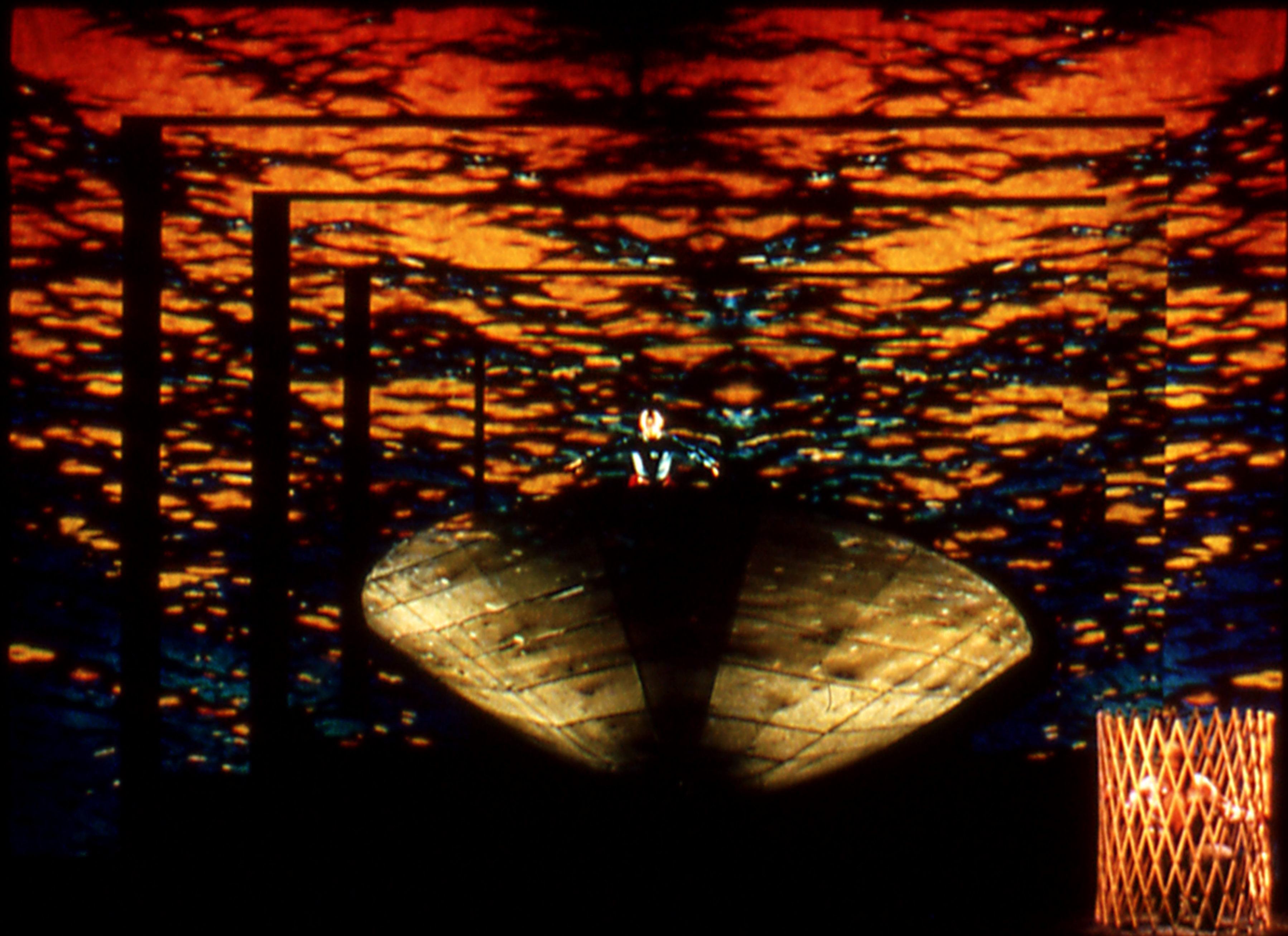




Actual Sho The Ship Prow

Reflections

Jeffrey Hunt
February 15 2026

Three sequential images from George Coates Performance Works, Actual Sho (1986). In the first, Hitomi is perched at the top of the cone, waves of projected imagery behind her, the entire visual field launching off into its own world. She's about to dive from the prow, falling through space — a moment that has always reminded me of Shakespeare: the prow of a ship cutting forward into the unknown. *The Tempest* — or perhaps one of the three shipwrecks from the lesser-known *Cymbeline*.

There are closer detail photos of the falling sequence as well, though some may require a bit of creative editing to make them usable. Astounding — pre-Cirque du Soleil — and I don't even like to compare.

But what the audience experienced was not these still frames — those brief seconds trapped in time. The performance was motion, music, breath, light, transformation — the passage of time itself. (Did I mention music?) Trying to capture that in a single photograph is impossible. A photograph freezes what was never static. Not remotely.

The original 35mm slide was shot on tungsten 160 film, pushed under low light and captured from far out in the house — from the audience seating. It's grainy, fragile, and imperfect, but it's also the closest direct record I have of what was happening onstage in that moment. A static image. So what did the audience actually experience from their seats, decades ago? Memory embellishes, of course — which circles back to the performance itself. Where is that performance now?

This is only a small piece of the performance: three slides, really — just enough to give a tantalizing hint of the moment. The frames here are tightly cropped into the central projection and performance space; a second set zooms out to include the musicians seated far stage right and far stage left. Complicated.

The design work — shaped by many collaborators — melds into a magnificent, seamless whole.

